

Going to Africa

Then one day when Grace got home from school, she saw a letter on the table with a crocodile stamp on it. Grace knew it must be from Papa, but it wasn't Christmas or her birthday.

"Guess what!" Ma said. "Your papa sent the money for two tickets to visit him in Africa for your spring vacation. Nana says she'll go with you if you want. What do you say?"

But Grace was speechless. She had made up so many fathers for herself, she forgot what the real one was like.

Grace and Nana left for Africa on a very cold gray day. They arrived in the Gambia in golden sunshine like the hottest summer back home. It had been a long, long trip. Grace barely noticed the strange sights and sounds that greeted her. She was thinking of Papa.

I wonder if Papa will still love me? thought Grace. He has other children now, and in stories the youngest is always the favorite. She held tightly to Nana. Outside the airport was a man who looked like Papa's photo. He swung Grace up in his arms and held her close. Grace buried her nose in his shirt and thought, I do remember.

In the car she started to notice how different everything seemed. There were sheep wandering along the roadside and people selling watermelons under the trees.

And when they reached her father's compound, there was the biggest difference of all. A pretty young woman with a little girl and a baby boy came to meet them. Grace said hello, but couldn't manage another word all evening. Everyone thought she was just tired. Except Nana.

"What's the matter, honey?" she asked when they went to bed. "You've got a father and a brother now, and they even have a dog!"

But Grace thought, "They make a storybook family without me."